



CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRADITIONAL CONFLICT IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S ICE CANDY-MAN

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ABSTRACT

Cultural consciousness allows us to see our cultural beliefs as social constructs that at best can never be more than mere approximations of a more complex reality. It reflects how we perceive reality. Every country or community has a distinct culture and often within it there are divergent cultural mores. Cultural diversity adds colour and variety to the human world but at the same time it divides people into numerous groups and sub - groups having little in common with one another, and thus proves a great barrier to human relationships. The present paper discusses cultural consciousness and presents conflicts; one has to suffer due to cultural differences.

Bapsi Sidhwa makes an honest attempt to measure the point of multiple intersections of territories, geographical, mental, and emotional losses of sufferers of Partition. In the novel *Ice Candy-Man*, Sidhwa used the child psyche to analyse the whole incident which takes place during the Partition. Her aim is to show how people were exploited in the name of religion, culture and became victims of communal hatred and cruelty during Partition. She has set her story of *Ice-Candy-Man* around the region of Western India with its historical, political and religious issues in general and cultural awareness in particular. Through the horrible consequences of Partition cultures were divided as new and affected the lives of Millions of population.

Keywords : atrocities, cultural consciousness, insecurity, intrigues, trauma

INTRODUCTION

Sidhwa explores the cultural differences that shapes the psyche of men and makes them rebellious. Intrigues, atrocities, love, hatred, betrayal and all such powerful words resonate throughout the novel making it immensely interesting and intact till the last line. With the atrocities caused by Partition, she generates the feeling of collective cultural identity. The violence of partition comprised both physical and psychological wounding. The physical wounds are linked up with aspects of somatically marked cultural identity.

The patriarchal setup is discriminatory against women and emphasizes on conditioning them for lifelong and willing subjugation to men. The women of *Ice-Candy-Man* are not only conscious of their desire, but also eagerly assertive about their independent handling of culture. The novel not only describes the Partition havoc but also people's consciousness towards their culture. Although the novel deals with a mixed culture of Hindu, Sikhs and Muslim, Sidhwa made an attempt to give some glances of her own Parsi culture. The dismemberment of India brought forth unprecedented violence-born refugees on all sides of the borders, to whom home became exile overnight, existence parts of memories, and identity a disorder between Self and Other. It gave rise to cultural consciousness and, "soul-searching intersections of Centrality/ Marginality" (Majumdar 74). Bapsi Sidhwa mentions the

consciousness regarding religion, culture and self as a tool to evaluate the characters of the novel. Her chosen location is Partition for physical and psychic cultural projection where only people living on both sides of border differentiate 'Self' and 'Other'. Partition inflicted people's identity crisis and quest of their inner self is more shocking and far reaching into unseen consequences than those of the Diasporics or the Migrants. Bapsi Sidhwa herself is a Parsi, she tried to unveil the culture of Parsis. Parsi community is very secretive but with the publication of The Crow Eaters, she reveals the true identity, culture and religious practices of Parsis.

Sidhwa evinces keen interest in the interaction of two or more cultures that exist side by side. The Partition of India is not a bygone event, but a contemporary phenomenon which influence the aspect of religion and culture. Sidhwa is not alone in her need to explain her heritage but shares with other Third-World writers, particularly those writing in a non-native language. It is also the compulsion to explain her culture to an audience unfamiliar with that culture. Most of the characters employed by Sidhwa in this novel are truly Parsi by their culture and traditions. Culture and tradition of a particular society plays an important role in mind making and perceiving things. As during the Partition days, Parsis are not allowed to interfere among other groups, their closeness or devotion towards the culture is astonishingly noticeable.

Sidhwa, herself a Parsi, aimed to re-enact the picture of the Partition through her novel Ice-Candy-Man. She throws light on the aspect, how Parsis had suffered in this holocaust. Through her Parsi characters like Lenny's parents- The Sethis, Col. Bharucha, Dr. Mody, Mr. Bankwala and many more, Sidhwa presents the insecurity and complexities for their religion and culture. Parsis were the descendents of the Aryan tribes and migrated from Persia (now Iran) to India just for saving their religion from being Islamized by the Arab invaders. Parsis had decided to follow the rules and customs of the ruling classes whether it may be Hindu, Muslim or Sikh in order to avoid all the possibility of any harm to their community. When the community migrated to Gujarat, they fully adopted the culture of Gujarat. Being an adaptable community, they realized that they can practice their religion and prosper it only when they remain loyal to the ruling people. Parsis were the first people to practice English language and ways under the British Raj and become the most Westernized Indian community. They also have knowledge of Gujarati language due to their settlement in Gujarat.

In the novel, Lenny's family never misses any congregation and gathering in Fire Temple of their Parsi community where they all fulfill their religious practices. Parsis of Lahore held a, "Jashan prayer" (32) to celebrate the victory of British in the Fire Temple. In the temple, the Fire alter is so sacred that the priest of the temple wears the, "cloth mask" (32) to prevent the specks of spittle. Parsis have a distinct cultural tradition. Each and every house has a small sacred fire which is kept alive permanently. In an interview Sidhwa explains that a Parsi Zoroastrian background influences her identity as a writer:

... it has formed my habits, my thoughts, my values, and I have fun portraying my community, as in Crow Eaters. No matter where they are the Parsis are a minority, and the tension this creates compels one to express feelings, ideas, politics etc. Being a Parsi can also make a writer more objective observer perhaps. (Hussain A. Internet)

Sidhwa brought readers close to her unknown community's culture and Islamic culture as well. Ice-Candy-Man suggest that she possesses the perception, the culture's knowledge and sentimental approach to community which makes it possible for being an cultural document. Whatever she has described about her culture, it is authentic just because of honesty of the events. In spite of being a member of secretive community, she revealed all cultural phenomena with honesty. However, she has successfully evoked the life of Lahore in the early part of twentieth century, Alamgir Hashmi points out in his excellent review of the novel as:

Bapsi Sidhwa writes from a deep historical consciousness. Her evocation of a part of Lahore life as

lived in the first half of this century is convincing and charming to me as a Lahorite myself. She herself grew up in Lahore and makes her home there: the first-hand knowledge of it certainly lends credence to the irony, as it arises out of a deep understanding of the place and people and their ways. (376)

In the novel, Lenny tours the village of Imamdin and notices how Khatija and Parveen, the adolescent sisters of Ranna, like the other girls in village, already wear the responsible expressions of much older women and they, "affect the mannerisms and tone of their mothers and aunts" (54). They are perplexed by Lenny's cropped hair and short dresses. Parsis dress themselves in modern style and speak English. Lenny also wears short dresses and has short hair. The girls of village live in restrictions and wears *suit-salwar*. Lenny perceives many differences in the personality traits and interests of men and women. Parveen, one of Ranna's sister astonishingly asks Lenny about the reason of her short hair. Lenny tells her that it is the "city fashion" and "Even my mother's hair is short". Leaving that place Lenny feels a kind of, "guilty conscience" (57) just because of the cultural difference and she realizes that culture matters a lot in shaping the mind.

Lenny's mother is very conscious about her religion, custom and practices. She wants to make her children aware about their cultural identity as a Parsi and takes them to Fire Temple in every congregation or festival. Despite her liberated handling of children and modern life-style, she is very much a traditional wife. Lenny pictures the inner sanctum of the Fire Temple by saying, "... I can see through two barred windows and an open archway the main fire altar. It is like gigantic silver egg cup and the flames are dancing above a bed of white ashes" (34). No one is allowed to enter into the inner sanctum except Priests who, "tend the fire" (34). Lenny is informed about "Tower of Silence" (113), a place where Parsis dispose the dead body. When she hears about Mr. Roger's mutilated body, she becomes aware about the death ritual of Christians and Parsis. She herself proclaims, "The shock of Mr Roger's demise makes me curious about all aspect of dying. 'What is the Tower of Silence' (113)? Among Parsis it is known as "Dungarwadi". It is a, "big round wall without any roof" (113). The dead body is put inside it for the vulture to clean and the Sun dries out the bones. It is supposed that after death our body should be used for the good. They believe, "... Instead of polluting the earth by burying it, or wasting fuel by burning it, we feed God's creatures" (114).

Sidhwa has put the name of Rodabai as Godmother to provide the religious responsibility in her character. As far as the name is concerned it is the translation of "Italian word 'Padrino'" and in english it has several meanings. One of them is, "... it designates a person who takes the responsibility of religious upbringing of another person (usually a newborn) when the latter is baptized in a Christian church" (Piciucco 213). Her figure is set to arouse the feeling of ethnicity in minds of children like Lenny, Adi and her cousin. She is the savior of religion and culture, who always tries her best to save her culture and traditions.

People are conscious for their cultural traits and tradition whether they are Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Christian. In the novel, there are glimpses of tradition followed by people. Hari who is Hindu has his shaven head with "bodhi-hair rising like a tail" (95). After asking about the reason by Lenny, he answer her that it is a tradition "... from the time of my grandfather's grandfathers ... it's the way of our caste" (95). Caste difference is also presented with the child psychology when Lenny states:

The Rogers of Birdwood Barracks, Queen Victoria and King George are English Christians: they look down their noses upon the Pens who are Anglo-Indian, who look down theirs on the Phailbuses who are Indian-Christian, who look down upon all non-Christians. (94)

What is remarkable in the novel is the traditional conflict, introduced by Sidhwa. In the novel when Partition havoc takes place, Muslims try to throw out all Hindu population from Lahore. Religion appears to have been the determinant of nationality because of the conflicting worldviews. People leave their ancestral home with heavy heart. But rest of people takes their own stake to live there. They are

compelled to leave their ancestral home. Mr. Singh informs Lenny's mother that all Hindu families have left from Lahore except them. He prefers to go rather than converting to Islam. Hari, the gardener converts himself to Muslim and named as Himmat Ali. The Muslim mob teases him and asks him to recite the "Kalma" (181) which is an essential part of Islamic culture. They ask him about his circumcision and make fun of him. Moti, the sweeper converts to Christianity. This conversion provides people a sense of loss and identity crisis. To become a Muslim is totally a cultural shock for them. They feel how to follow their own cultural traits.

In Ayah's case this conversion makes her alienated. Ice-candy-man compels her to live as his mother and sisters live on *Kotha*. He has, "trapped her in the poisonous atmosphere of the *Kotha*" (250). Before Partition ice-candy-man ask her out of curiosity that why she does not wear Punjabi clothes, this shows that he is aware about cultural traits. But Ayah is forced to wear the, "divided skirts of *garara*" and compulsion of veil "*ghoongat*" (260) instead of Sari. She has to change her name to Mumtaz. Ayah's Indian Hindu Identity get derooted from her known culture and established in the Muslim culture by her forced marriage to ice-candy-man. Again she is rescued for coming back to Amritsar, her own place and culture. She has been through all, the Hindu Self and the Muslim other, who lost her love, trust and sense of assured identity. This trauma is brought by Ayah's most infatuated admirer, the Ice-candy-man. Without going deep into the events, one could realize the pain of conversion to other culture. Because, "... identity is connectivity, connecting to the world of concern and affection, it is a construct basically based on psychic, religious, emotional, social stilts of the community as such" (Majumdar 81). Identity is based upon compromises and survival just to save their life.

In the mayhem of Partition, Muslims proclaims, "We cannot leave, '... 'What face will we show to our forefathers on the day of judgment if we abandon their graves" (195)? This is cultural representation of displacement. Muslim considers it a cultural responsibility to provide the peace to their forefathers in their graves. They believe that on doom's day or the Day of Judgment they will meet with their forefathers. They are deep rooted with their cultural traits. Ice-candy man's declaration also proves his devotion towards his religion or culture when he says, "If we want India back we must take pride in our customs, our clothes, our languages ... And not go mouthing the got-pit sot-pit of the English" (28-29). In his character deep embedded cultural consciousness is also seen. He salaams to Godmother by touching his forehead when she comes to meet Ayah.

Lenny's mother always keeps herself busy in religious practices. She appears, "... devout, her head covered by a gauzy white scarf and smelling of sandalwood. She has been praying" (41). In Parsi culture there is a ceremony to invoke the great "Trouble Easers, the angels Mushkail Assan and Behram Yazd" (241). They are the gods who frequently evoked by the Parsees at trouble times. Mother makes preparations for the ceremony by putting a white sheet on the floor and placing the small fire altar and photographs of saints on it. These ceremonies she does in home to make her children more religious and committed. According to Parsi belief, she places a, "... six-inch iron nail, blessed by the Parsee mystic Mobed Ibara, the disciple of Dastur Kookadar" (213), under the mattress to vanish off fear from her children's heart.

The novel presents the picture of cultural complexities and problems of displacement. Despite it, the final message of the novel is clear. It rejects the two nation theory and suggests that religious, social and cultural differences are artificially created and exploited by unscrupulous people. Sidhwa also suggests that power should be used for the good of the people and to suppress the evil. Being a member of minority community, she is equally conscious for her religion and culture as other minorities. Her novel reveals the pain of migrants who come from other land to retain their religion and culture. Partition of India was the pivotal moment for those who had to leave their land and hearth for survival. The novel suggests Sidhwa's psyche behind writing this novel.



CONCLUSION

In the novel, the idea is quite clear that religion and culture of an individual is as essential as food and water for living. Anybody can be recognized only through his or her religion and culture. Culture makes a person's identity and it can change the whole thought process. The novel also proves this fact that cultural and traditional conflicts make people rebellious and violent.

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